

Physical Health:

A Guide for Gynecological Cancer Survivors

What do you need to know about your physical health?

Cancer and its treatment can affect your body in many ways. You may need to adapt to a “new normal” that is different than your life before cancer. This may cause sadness, anxiety or anger. It is important that you know what to expect and learn how to manage any long-term side effects.

Physical side effects

Here are some of the physical side effects that gynecological cancer survivors may experience. Please note, this list is for information only. You may or may not experience these side effects.

- Fatigue
- Difficulty sleeping
- Bowel problems (such as, diarrhea, constipation)
- Gastrointestinal problems (such as, nausea, vomiting)
- Menopausal symptoms (such as, hot flashes)
- Neuropathy (tingling and/or painful sensations in your hands or feet)
- Cognitive changes (chemo brain)
- Changes to hair and skin condition (such as, scarring and hair loss)
- Changes to your lung function
- Urinary problems (such as leaking urine (pee), trouble with emptying the bladder)
- Lymphedema (swelling in your arms and legs)
- Weight gain or loss
- Joint and muscle discomfort
- Loss of hearing and vision

How to access support:

- Contact your healthcare team. Your healthcare team can evaluate your needs and provide a referral to other professionals who can help.
- Talk to a registered nurse or find health services using [Health811](#) (formerly Telehealth). You can call 811 (TTY: 1-866-797-0007) or use the [online chat](#).
- Find services in your area with the Canadian Cancer Society’s [Community Services Locator](#).

Other things you can do

Be patient and monitor your symptoms

Recovery can be a long process. Many effects of treatment will disappear very quickly, while others may remain for months or years, sometimes becoming chronic conditions. Be patient, but monitor the issues that impact your quality of life.

Try physical activity

Daily exercise is considered a primary method to support recovery:

- You can start with a simple walk, then increase the time and intensity as you are able. Just being in the fresh air and moving will help strengthen your muscles and can help you feel better.
- Aerobic and resistance exercises, such as biking, resistance training, walking, and using weights, can decrease tiredness, pain, shortness of breath, and insomnia.
- The practice of Tai Chi, a Chinese martial art practice involving slow and controlled movements, can help reduce fatigue and improve sleep.

Consider mindfulness

Mindfulness-based strategies, such as yoga, art therapy, and meditation, can help to train your mind to be present in each moment. These practices can help reduce psychological distress, fear of cancer recurrence, fatigue, pain, and sleep disturbances.

Include music in your recovery. Listening to a style of pre-recorded music that you enjoy can be useful to relieve symptoms and help with pain management.

More information

[Life After Primary Gynecological Cancer Treatment: A Guide for Survivors and Caregivers](#) by Queen's University School of Nursing can help you prepare for life after gynecological cancer treatment. It provides information for people who are recovering from cancer and care partners. (Information and resources on physical health can be found on pg. 10-14 and on pg. 41)

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Should you require this information in an accessible format, please contact 1-877-280-8538, TTY 1-800-855-0511, info@ontariohealth.ca.

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